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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 000617

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SUBJECT: ALEMAN STORMS ALN HEADQUARTERS, BUT REFUSES TO MEET PRIVATELY WITH MONTEALEGRE

REF: MANAGUA 0543

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) Summary: With an entourage of PLC party hacks and media in toe, former president Arnolando Aleman recently paid an impromptu (although some ALN members appear to have expected it) visit on rival ALN party headquarters. Eduardo Montealegre was in the midst of chairing his party's weekly board of directors meeting, so Aleman was invited to meet with other ALN leaders. According to ALN National Assembly caucus leader Maria Eugenia Sequeira, Aleman flatly rejected her party's proposals to set a common legislative agenda and present a joint list of qualified candidates for judiciary appointments. She believes that Aleman "generously" offered to postpone the PLC's internal elections because he has lost much of his following. ALN planning coordinator Kitty Monterrey confirmed that Aleman declined Montealegre's offer to meet privately -- removed from the gaggle of reporters. Aleman's motive for the visit was clearly to deflect attention from his failing internal election effort, and to create a media circus to convince the public that he is the leader of the opposition and that Montealegre had rebuffed the "humble" PLC leader's efforts for Liberal unity. End Summary.

¶2. (C) On March 5, with an entourage of Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) hacks and media in toe, former president/convicted embezzler Arnolando Aleman paid an impromptu, likely pre-orchestrated, visit on rival Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) headquarters. According to ALN planning coordinator Kitty Monterrey, who received the PLC leader at the door, Aleman requested to meet with ALN leader/2006 presidential candidate Eduardo Montealegre to discuss Liberal unity. Montealegre was in the midst of chairing his party's weekly board of directors meeting, so Aleman was invited to meet with other ALN leaders, including Assembly Deputies Maria Eugenia Sequeira, Yamileth Bonilla, and Eliseo Nunez, Sr.; Parlacen Deputy Eliseo Nunez, Jr.; and, legal adviser Mauricio Montealegre.

Aleman Rejects Common Legislative Agenda

¶3. (C) Sequeira, who presides over the ALN National Assembly caucus, recounted to PolCouns that Aleman responded to the ALN proposal that the two estranged Liberal parties establish a common legislative agenda to contain President Ortega, with an unequivocal "no." Similarly, when the ALN leaders recommended forming a joint working group to present a list of qualified candidates to replace a number of judges whose terms have expired, Aleman's response was a resounding negative. Aleman was magnanimous on only one item -- his offer to postpone the PLC's internal elections to allow more time for all Liberals to join what he touts as his Liberal unification initiative.

Is Pact-Bound Aleman Losing His Followers?

¶4. (C) For Sequeira, Aleman's "generous offer" was nothing more than a ruse to conceal his desperation because nobody is beating down the door to participate in the PLC elections. She noted that Aleman's unwillingness to discuss serious issues evidences his unwillingness to support any action that could incur the wrath of political pact mate Daniel Ortega. Aleman's primary objective was to orchestrate a media circus to feature him as the "humble" political leader who only seeks to unify Nicaragua's Liberals, opined Sequeira. Monterrey supported Sequeira's assessment, reporting that when Aleman was invited to meet privately with Montealegre, without the cameras rolling, he declined.

ALN Suspects Internal Complicity, Tries to Turn Incident to Its Advantage

¶5. (C) Monterrey shared her suspicions that Eliseo Nunez, Sr., and possibly Yamileth Bonilla and Eliseo Nunez, Jr., may have been "complicit"

¶6. (C) On March 6, PLC lawmaker Jose Pallais opined to PolCouns that Aleman's impromptu visit to the ALN was in part a tactic to demonstrate t

Comment

¶7. (C) We hear from both ALN and PLC contacts that the bulk of Liberals seek a united opposition and lay much of the blame for Ortega's victory on the failure of their leaders to unite before the November 2006 election and Aleman's pact with their Sandinista arch-enemy. Aleman's failure to attract participation in his party's internal annual elections likely reflects this common sentiment and the belief among some Liberal activists that Aleman will manipulate the outcome (reftel). We doubt that Aleman's visit was as spontaneous as he tried to make it appear. Timing the visit to coincide with Montealegre's presence at his party headquarters suggests that the visit was precooked.

¶8. (C) We suspect that Aleman's true motive for the visit was to create a media circus to dupe the public into

believing that he, not Montealegre, is the leader of the opposition and that Montealegre had rebuffed the humble PLC leader's efforts for Liberal unity. Much of the media coverage of Aleman's "blitzkrieg" on the ALN has been vague, leaving it to the public to decide whether Montealegre rejected Aleman -- PLC deputy Enrique Quinonez' widely publicized version of the events -- or whether Montealegre called the PLC leader's bluff.

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